

OUR WESLEYAN TRADITION:
WESLEYAN FAITH AND PRACTICE AND THE PLNU MISSION
A Working Document curated by Mark Mann and Ron Benefiel

Point Loma Nazarene University exists to provide higher education in a vital Christian community where minds are engaged and challenged, character is modeled and formed, and service becomes an expression of faith. Being of Wesleyan heritage, we aspire to be a learning community where grace is foundational, truth is pursued, and holiness is a way of life.

Introduction

Point Loma Nazarene University (PLNU) is an institution of the Church of the Nazarene and therefore a Christian university in the Wesleyan tradition. The purpose of this document is to clarify what we at PLNU mean by “the Wesleyan tradition.” In addressing this, we will draw upon the writings of John and Charles Wesley, the practices of the early Methodists, and the subsequent development of Wesleyan theology. We also are writing with concern for what it means to be a Christian institution in the Wesleyan tradition for the educational context of PLNU.

Section I: The Wesleyan Tradition

Wesleyan thought and practice have their origins in the Evangelical Revival in 18th century England, one of the most significant revivals in Christian history.¹ It has continued to have a major impact on the world today through numerous movements and denominations, including those in the Methodist family (e.g., United Methodist Church, African Methodist Episcopal, and African Methodist Episcopal, Zion), the American Holiness movement (e.g., Church of the Nazarene, Wesleyan Church, Salvation Army, Free Methodist Church, and Church of God—Anderson), most Pentecostal denominations (e.g., Church of God in Christ, Foursquare Gospel Church, Church of God—Cleveland, and the Assemblies of God), and many independent evangelical churches.

John and Charles Wesley were leaders in the Evangelical Revival and founders of the Methodist movement and the Wesleyan tradition.² The Wesleys were ministers in the Church of England (or, the Anglican Church) who sought to revive the Church of their day and renew it in the spirit and power of the early Church. John (1703-1791) is especially known for his leadership, organizational ability, and extensive writing. Charles (1707-1788) is regarded for his poetry and hymns, which powerfully express the spirit and theology of the Wesleyan tradition. Many of the Wesley hymns remain popular today.³

Early Methodism was characterized by a sense of the presence and power of God. Tens of thousands of people responded to the ministry of the Wesleys as they called people to repentance and holiness of heart and life through their preaching, music, and writings. The Wesleys created small groups in which

¹ Leading historian Mark Noll has listed the Wesleys’ “conversion” and subsequent role in the Evangelical Revival as one of the ten most significant events in the history of Christianity. Cf. his *Turning Points: Decisive Moments in the History of Christianity* (Baker Academic, 2001).

² There was also a non-Wesleyan/Calvinist contingent within early Methodism, but it generally faded away (except in Wales) following the death of its chief proponents, George Whitefield and Lady Huntingdon.

³ These include “Hark! The Herald Angels Sing,” “Christ the Lord Is Risen Today,” “O For a Thousand Tongues to Sing,” “And Can It Be,” “Arise My Soul, Arise,” “Love Divine, All Loves Excelling,” “Come, Thou Long Expected Jesus.”

seekers and converts held each other accountable for the pursuit of holiness—that is, complete devotion to God and love for neighbor. In this sense, to be Wesleyan is to be committed to Christ and Christian discipleship in Christian community.

The Wesleys' ultimate goal was the transformation of believers through an emphasis on spiritual disciplines and practices that cultivate hearts and lives of holiness.⁴ This emphasis is reflected in their approach to theology, often referred to as *practical divinity*, and is expressed in the form, context, and content of the Wesleys' writings. Rather than creedal confessions or systematic theological statements, the Wesleys communicated their theology through sermons, hymns, spiritual journals, occasional tracts, and the minutes of conferences (at which the doctrinal and practical disputes of early Methodism were addressed). The language and content of these writings were saturated with scripture. They reflect both the social context and pastoral concern of the development of the Wesleys' thought as leaders of a revival movement. Indeed, most of the Wesleys' writings are concerned with practical matters of Christian faith and doctrine in relation to the spread of the Evangelical Revival and support of the Methodist societies.

Another important aspect of the Wesleys' theology was their proclivity for holding together in dynamic tension a wide variety of seemingly divergent theological sources and traditions. Many scholars refer to this as a *via media* ("middle way"). In large part this was a reflection of their training in the Anglican tradition. From its founding in the 16th century, the Church of England has attempted to maintain a broad alliance between Catholic- and Protestant-leaning groups in England, and to hold together in one fellowship a broad variety of sometimes dissenting voices. For this reason Anglicans often claim that their church forges a kind of theological and religious *via media*, especially between Roman Catholicism and classical Protestantism, that seeks to avoid the excesses while embracing the strengths of each.

In the spirit of the *via media*, the Wesleys drew upon the depth and breadth of the Christian tradition in their teachings and ministry. They drank deeply from the well of early Church writers from both East and West,⁵ were influenced by Continental European figures (both Catholic *and* Protestant), and were of course immersed in the thought of a wide variety of leading Anglican theologians and philosophers.

Section II: The Triune God of Love

The Wesleyan tradition is deeply rooted within historic Christianity, including its teachings about the nature and character of God. In his writings, John Wesley explicitly affirms the classic attributes (or, as he sometimes puts it, the "perfections") of God.⁶ God is omnipotent, omnipresent, and omniscient. God is almighty Creator of the universe, perfect in love, justice, and mercy; holy and sovereign over all things.

⁴ Scholars refer to this as "orthokardia"—that is, a "right heart" or "love" for God. For Wesleyans, this is not to de-emphasize orthodoxy ("right worship/belief") or orthopraxy ("right practice") but as a complement to these. See especially Gregory S. Clapper, *The Renewal of the Heart Is the Mission of the Church: Wesley's Heart Religion in the Twenty-First Century* (Cascade Books, 2010).

⁵ Church historians often rhetorically "split" the early Christian church into East and West to describe the distinct languages and cultures of the Roman Empire and the diverging theological concerns and styles that would eventually lead to the formal "split" between the Catholic Church (West) and Orthodox Church (East) in the 11th century.

⁶ See John Wesley's sermon "The Unity of the Divine Being."

With the Wesleys, the Wesleyan tradition embraces all that is affirmed about God in the classic creeds of the Church (namely, the Apostles' Creed, the Nicene Creed, and the Chalcedonian Definition).⁷

This is not to say that Wesleyans have viewed God in *exactly* the same way that all other Christian traditions have. Where differences occur they are often subtle, usually simple differences in emphasis, but nevertheless with significant ramifications, especially when considering matters of sin, salvation, and Christian holiness. Wesleyan theologians speak of these differences in terms of how one affirms both the sovereignty and love of God. Theologians in some traditions emphasize God's sovereignty and understand God's love in light of God's sovereignty. Wesleyans, on the other hand, tend to emphasize God's love, and understand God's sovereignty in light of divine love. An example of this is expressed in differing views of the atonement. Many Christians who emphasize divine sovereignty also believe that Christ died *only* for those whom God has preordained to be saved. In contrast, Wesleyans believe that in love Christ died for *all* people, and that all have the opportunity to respond in grace to God's offer of salvation.

Together with all orthodox Christians, Wesleyans also affirm, in accordance with the Nicene Creed, that God is Trinity, a communion of three distinct persons who share one divine essence and exist in unity and loving interdependence. The doctrine of the Trinity is foundational to Wesleyan theology for illuminating the love that binds each person of the Trinity in an eternally existing interrelationship of love. All life and creation, redemption and reconciliation take place within the context of this Trinitarian drama of love.⁸

Section III: Revelation and Authority: God's Word Revealed in Scripture and Nature

The Triune God reveals the Word of God, Jesus Christ, to us in both Scripture and nature (John 1:1-14). Sin has marred our ability to receive, know or believe God's Word. But this God-given ability can be restored by God's grace. In faith, the Holy Spirit reveals the Word of God to us through our physical senses, spiritual sensibilities, and ability to reason. In all of this, the traditional teachings of the Church serve as a guide for our faith.

Wesleyans affirm that God is fully and perfectly revealed in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ, the Word of God. Always and everywhere the Holy Spirit reveals the Father made manifest in

⁷ John Wesley, as an Anglican, also embraced the Athanasian Creed, however, this is not officially affirmed by the Church of the Nazarene. See Appendix A for the actual wording of the Apostles, Nicene, and Chalcedonian statements.

⁸ See the Nicene Creed in Appendix A. Traditional Trinitarian language seeks to connect who God is with how God lovingly acts: the Father creates and redeems through the Son by the Holy Spirit for ever and ever. The early Church writers understood the metaphorical nature and limits of such gendered language. Gregory of Nyssa, one of the chief formulators of Nicene orthodoxy wrote, "No one can adequately grasp the terms pertaining to God. For example, "mother," is mentioned in the Song instead of "father." Both terms mean the same, because there is neither male nor female in God. For how can anything transitory like this be attributed to God? But when we are one in Christ, we are divested of the signs of this difference along with our old [sinful nature]. Therefore, every name equally indicates God's ineffable nature; neither can 'male' nor 'female' defile God's pure nature." Cf. Gregory of Nyssa, "Homilies on the Song of Songs 7" in *Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture: Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Song of Solomon*, ed. J. Robert Wright (InterVarsity Press, 2005).

Jesus Christ. For Wesleyans, then, all divine revelation is profoundly Trinitarian, centered in Jesus Christ by the illuminating witness of the Holy Spirit. Moreover, we believe that the Holy Spirit illuminates *all* things, both visible and invisible, an illumination that becomes fully apparent to us through faith in Jesus Christ, who died and was raised from the dead for our sins (I Cor. 2:9-10).

For Wesleyans Scripture most perfectly gives witness to the saving revelation of God in Christ, and is therefore the ultimate authority in all matters of Christian faith and practice. For this reason, John Wesley often referred to himself as a “man of one book” and dedicated his life to studying Scripture and expounding it to others. John’s sermons and Charles’ hymns are thoroughly permeated with Scripture, and John wrote commentaries on both the Old and New Testaments.

As Wesleyans we recognize that Scripture is complex and multi-layered and bears the mark of the historical context and personal perspectives of the writers. Nevertheless, we believe that through Scripture the Holy Spirit guides us into all Truth, who is Jesus Christ (John 14:6, 16:13). John Wesley affirmed that individual passages of Scripture are best understood in light of the whole of Scripture. Moreover, Scripture chiefly reveals the person of Jesus Christ and its ultimate purpose is to lead us to faith and holiness in Christ. In line with these convictions, the Church of the Nazarene officially affirms that Scripture “inerrantly reveal[s] the will of God concerning us in all things necessary to our salvation.”⁹ In other words, Scripture is best understood as the story of God’s work of redemption in Jesus Christ revealed to us by the Holy Spirit.

As Wesleyans we also believe that God reveals the wonder, majesty, and glory of Jesus Christ in and through nature. As Scripture affirms, *all things* were created through and are held together by the Word of God (John 1:3, Col. 1:16-17). John especially took a keen interest in natural philosophy (the 18th century term for science). He conducted his own experiments (especially on electricity) and published both a multi-volume book that outlined the latest scientific findings of his day¹⁰ and one of the most popular medical texts of the 18th century.¹¹

The Wesleys also believed that God has equipped us for discerning God’s revelation in Scripture and nature. As empiricists they believed that we gain much of our knowledge—including knowledge of God’s Word—through our physical senses (especially sight and hearing).¹² They also believed we have been given a kind of “sixth sense”—a spiritual sensibility for discerning things otherwise invisible to us, such as God’s saving love. In addition to sensory ways of knowing, God has created us with the capacity to reason. Our minds are tools to help us understand our world and discern truth from error.

⁹ See Article IV in the Articles of Faith of the Church of the Nazarene, found in Appendix B.

¹⁰ See John Wesley, *A Survey of the Wisdom of God in the Creation: or, A Compendium of Natural Philosophy*, published in two volumes in 1783.

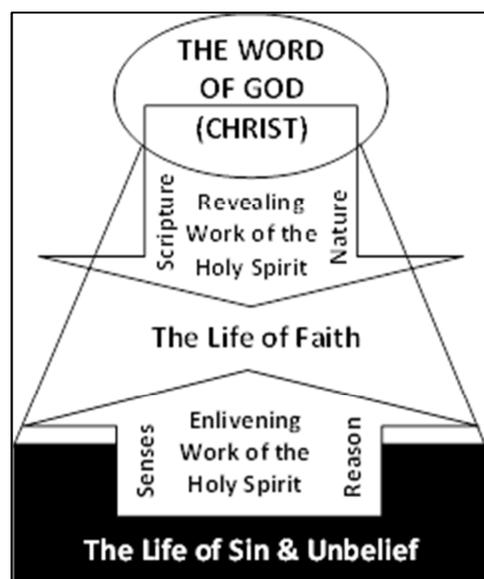
¹¹ See John Wesley, *Primitive Physick, or An Easy and Natural Method of Curing Most Diseases* (1847). This book is mostly practical medical prescriptions intended for persons who could not afford medical care, and demonstrates that Wesley is conversant with the best of the medical science of his era, as well as widely knowledgeable of natural folk remedies. Cf. Samuel J. Rogal, “Pills for the Poor: John Wesley’s Primitive Physick,” *Yale Journal of Biology and Medicine* 51:1 (Jan-Feb 1978): 81-90.

¹² John Wesley’s empiricist convictions are expressed most thoroughly in the Appendices to Vol. 2 of *A Survey of the Wisdom of God in the Creation*, op cit.

However, the Wesleys also recognized that we face a serious problem. We are sinful creatures whose physical senses and spiritual sensibilities have been dimmed and whose capacity for reason has become distorted by sin. In such a condition, while still capable of correctly ascertaining mundane facts about the physical reality around us, we cannot discern the Word of God, either through Scripture or nature. Without faith in Christ through the guidance of the Holy Spirit, Scripture is merely an historical artifact and nature is nothing more than the matter and processes that make up the physical world. Neither on its own reveals the Word of God to us.¹³

But there is good news. We never exist purely in our natural, sinful state, but instead always in the gracious presence of the Holy Spirit, who continually seeks to enliven our senses, enlighten our minds, and invigorate our hearts. The illuminating power of the Holy Spirit is present to all persons, so that even non-believers may perceive the truth about Jesus in Scripture or look up at the stars at night and discern the handiwork of the Creator (Ps 19:1). Otherwise saving faith in Christ would not be possible, for our ability to repent of our sins and turn to God relies entirely upon the faith inspired by God's presence to us in the enlivening, enlightening, and invigorating work of the Holy Spirit.¹⁴

For those who do repent and come to saving faith in Christ, a whole new way of seeing things becomes possible.¹⁵ John Wesley spoke of the enlivening of our spiritual sensibilities that occurs in the new life of faith as similar to that which happens with the physical senses at the birth of a baby. Our "spiritual" eyes and ears are opened and our capacity to reason and understand is restored so that we can truly see and comprehend the truths of God in Scripture as well as the handiwork of God in nature. Scripture becomes for us the Living Word of God through which the Holy Spirit teaches us, guides us, and directs us to growth in holiness. Nature becomes the handiwork of God whose grandeur, majesty, and love are manifest in the vastness of interstellar space or the infinitely subtle intricacies of a single human cell.



The Confirming Witness of the Spirit: The Wesleys believed that the Holy Spirit bears witness to God's saving work in our lives in both indirect (or mediated) and direct (or unmediated) ways. The "indirect" witness comes through the enlivening of our physical senses through which we observe God at work in both our own lives and the lives of others. Wesleyans thus often speak of the fruit of the Spirit as observable confirmation of the truth of the promises of Scripture and assurance of the reality of God's transforming grace.

The Wesleys also believed that, with the enlivening of our spiritual sensibilities through faith in Christ, we develop a greater capacity for discerning and appropriating the love and will of God, especially in

¹³ See especially John Wesley's sermon, "The Imperfection of Human Knowledge."

¹⁴ In Wesleyan theology such grace is referred to as "prevenient grace" and will be discussed further in Section IV.

¹⁵ Cf. John Wesley's sermon, "The New Birth."

matters pertaining to our salvation. This is the “direct” witness of the Holy Spirit to our own spirits in which we are personally assured of God’s love and acceptance as children of God. Wesleyans understand that the witness of the Spirit frees us from the slavery of doubt and despair and empowers us to live in confident assurance of God’s presence and peace.¹⁶

We speak of such experiences as *confirming* because they must always be tested by scriptural teachings and promises. This is why it is vitally important for believers to be active in and accountable to the Body of Christ. We are more likely to discern correctly which experiences testify truly to the Word of God when in community with other Christians.

The Instrumental Role of Reason: Wesleyans believe, as noted earlier, that restored human reason can contribute significantly to our understanding of God’s Word. In affirming this, John and Charles Wesley were aligned with both ancient Christian teachings and what is now referred to as the “Spirit of the Enlightenment.”¹⁷ If God is the Creator of an ordered and fundamentally rational universe, God is also the source of rationality. And since human beings are created in the divine image, we have the capacity for rational reflection as well. This is not to say that reason on its own can lead us to knowledge of God. Rather, with the Wesleyan tradition we prefer to speak of reason as an instrument or tool granted to human beings which, when restored by faith in Christ and enlightened by the Holy Spirit, can contribute to our understanding of God’s Word in Scripture and nature.

The Guiding Role of Tradition: As Wesleyans we recognize the authority of the historic teachings of the Church (especially the early Church) in knowing God’s Word, Jesus Christ, in Scripture and nature. We believe that God, through the Holy Spirit, has worked in and through the Church as it has sought to be faithful to the witness of Scripture by affirming “rules of faith,” including especially the Apostle’s Creed, the Nicene Creed, and the Chalcedonian Definition. These creeds continue to guide and assist the Church today in seeing and hearing God’s Word in Scripture and nature. For PLNU tradition also includes the Articles of Faith of the Church of the Nazarene.¹⁸

To speak of tradition as a guide is to recognize that God’s Word in Scripture and nature is properly understood when informed by the wisdom of the historic Church and under the direction of the Holy Spirit. We recognize that the Church through history has spoken with a variety of voices, and that the Church continues to wrestle with and further develop its understanding of the deep theological mysteries and core tenets of Christian faith. As we continuously seek to be faithful to the gospel of Christ, Wesleyans affirm that the Holy Spirit will continue to use the voice of the Church to help us properly understand God’s Word in Scripture and nature.

¹⁶ This should not be interpreted to mean that Christians will never again struggle with questions or doubt. In fact, we learn from John and Charles’ journals that both experienced such struggles throughout their lives. We also see that, despite these struggles, God’s grace empowered them to live as faithful Christians and to lead countless others to saving faith.

¹⁷ The Enlightenment is often called “The Age of Reason” because of the lofty expectations many people had for what might be learned and accomplished through the use of human reason. The Wesleys were clearly aligned with this way of thinking but with significant reservations—they believed that human reason could only accomplish its possibilities when first restored from the effects of original sin.

¹⁸ For the Articles of Faith of the Church of the Nazarene, see Appendix B.

*Section IV: Sin, Salvation, and Christian Holiness: The Ruin and Restoration of Love*¹⁹

As with most Christians, Wesleyan reflection on the nature of salvation generally begins with serious consideration of the problem of sin.²⁰ Everything was created by God, with all of creation ordered by God. Thus, humans were created in the image of God, intended for loving relationship with God and for reflecting God's love in all of creation. But, because of sin (i.e., the Fall²¹), our love for God and creation has been marred. The image of God has been corrupted in such a way that we tend to place other desires ahead of our desire to love and serve God. This is the fundamental nature of sin and its consequences are universal. Sin corrupts our relationships, communities, societies and even the created environment. (Gen 1:26-31; 2:15).

Just as sin has corrupted the image of God in humanity, salvation is ultimately the restoration of the image of God with the potential reparation of all that sin has affected. The renewal of the image of God is made possible by the grace of God through the atoning work of Jesus Christ and empowering presence of the Holy Spirit seeking to reconcile us—indeed, all of creation—to God (2 Cor 5:18-21). For Wesleyans, salvation is not only a matter of our eternal destiny, it is the renewal of our capacity to love God with our entire heart, soul, mind and strength and our neighbor as ourselves in this life. The grace of God is given not only for personal salvation but also for the repair of human relationships, communities, and societies, and, indeed, all of creation. As Wesleyans we therefore embrace an expansive and all-inclusive hope for the renewal and restoration of all that has been damaged by sin. Many in the Wesleyan tradition refer to this as “the optimism of grace” or “the hope of glory.”

As Wesleyans we also affirm that we have been given a certain measure of responsibility in the work of salvation.²² Faced with the terrible power and consequences of sin, on our own we would only be capable of continuing to choose our own sinful, selfish way. But, we are never left alone. God is with us even in the greatest depths of our sin. This continual presence of God is known as “prevenient grace”—the grace given to us by God *before* we have come to faith in Christ. To talk about prevenient grace is another way of saying that the Holy Spirit perpetually convicts us of our sin, reveals to us God's love, mercy, and forgiveness, calls us to repentance, and gives us the ability to offer ourselves in confession and obedience to God. In this way we are empowered by the gracious presence of God to respond by faith in repentance and obedience to the call of God for our salvation.²³

¹⁹ The best overview of the Wesleyan view of salvation is found in John Wesley's sermon “The Scripture Way of Salvation.”

²⁰ See John Wesley's sermon “Original Sin.”

²¹ The “Fall” refers to the sins of Adam and Eve recorded in Genesis 3, which Christians have traditionally affirmed as the pivotal entrance of sin into the world and the cause of the universal condition of human sinfulness. Some contemporary Christians would hesitate to blame Adam and Eve as the cause of all subsequent sin, but would still embrace the universality of sin, arguing that the story of Adam and Even is a kind of allegory or metaphor for the experience of all human beings as we come to encounter our own depravity.

²² In this respect, Wesleyans draw especially from the work of the 16th century Dutch theologian Jacob Arminius, and therefore are often called “Wesleyan-Arminian.”

²³ See John Wesley's sermon “On Working out Our Own Salvation.”

Wesleyans believe that this encounter with saving grace involves two distinct but interrelated changes for believers: justification and sanctification. In justification, we are “made right” in the sight of God. Through grace-initiated repentance, our sins are forgiven and our guilt taken away. The Wesleys believed that this encounter with God’s justifying grace also initiates what scripture refers to as the “new birth,” for we are literally “born again.” In justification believers are brought into a completely new life in which we are reconciled to God and experience the life-transforming presence of the Holy Spirit.

For Wesleyans the new birth is just the beginning of a journey of growth in grace. After we have been justified, the grace-empowered work of sanctification begins. As we continue to respond to God by participating in the means of grace (see Section VI), the Holy Spirit re-forms our character, our desires, our attitudes, and our behavior in the likeness of Christ. In sanctification, the image of God is being renewed in us, restoring in us the possibility of love for God and neighbor.²⁴ Wesleyans believe that, at some point in this journey,²⁵ we can by the power of the Holy Spirit become completely devoted to God and filled to overflowing with all of the fruit of the Spirit: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control (Gal. 5:22-23). Wesleyans refer to this as holiness of heart and life, Christian perfection,²⁶ or entire sanctification.²⁷

As Wesleyans we affirm that God’s purposes for salvation are not limited to us as individuals, but have implications for all relationships, all communities and societies, and even the created environment. The Wesleys spoke expansively about the possibilities of God’s grace. Just as they believed that the effects of sin are pervasive, they affirmed that the grace of God can restore *all* that sin has ravaged. In the belief that God could transform unjust social structures, John spoke out against slavery and economic practices that especially caused harm to the poor and to children.²⁸ John also affirmed that all God’s creatures are intended by God to be recipients of love, and therefore spoke out against cruelty to animals.

For Wesleyans, the hope of God’s redemptive and restorative work is not limited to this life, but also extends to the life to come. Wesleyans believe that God’s final kingdom has been inaugurated already through the presence and power of the Holy Spirit at work in and through the Church as it gives witness

²⁴ See John Wesley’s sermon “The New Birth.”

²⁵ For some this point is experienced through a critical moment of complete consecration, while others experience this as the culmination of a long and gradual process of growth in grace.

²⁶ See John Wesley’s sermon, “Christian Perfection,” and his treatise “A Plain Account of Christian Perfection.” The Wesleys used the language of perfection because it was biblical, fully recognizing that such perfection only refers to love for God and neighbor, and not in relationship to knowledge, action, or human failings that are a consequence of our finite, bodily nature.

²⁷ Christian holiness has been one of the most contested doctrines in the history of the Wesleyan movement. John and Charles disagreed about the extent to which persons could be perfected in love in this life, with John being more optimistic and Charles being more cautious. By the middle of the nineteenth century, Methodists had generally come to embrace Charles’s more cautious approach, and to see Christian perfection as a goal which Christians are ever to pursue, even if they should not expect to experience fully in this life. In response to this development in Methodism, Holiness movement advocates, including early Nazarenes, understood themselves to be recovering John’s teachings when they affirmed that believers can experience the fullness of holy love in this life through the baptism of the Holy Spirit. John actually did not identify entire sanctification with the Baptism of the Holy Spirit.

²⁸ See John Wesley’s “Thoughts on Slavery” and “The Scarcity of Provisions.”

to the Lordship of Jesus Christ. Wesleyans also look forward to the return of Christ to fully establish God's kingdom and restore all of creation. The saints of all ages will be raised from the dead to join all believers in welcoming Christ back to earth. In this "new creation," there will be no more pain, sickness or death and *all things* will be fully restored to God and perfected in love.²⁹ And of God's kingdom, there will be no end!

Section V: The Church: The People of God Made Holy in Love

As lifelong members and then priests of the Church of England, the Wesleys generally embraced an Anglican understanding of the nature and mission of the Church. The Church of England claimed direct continuity with the one, holy, catholic (universal), and apostolic Church—that is, founded by Jesus Christ with his mission and authority passed on through the apostles. Anglican theology also held that the Church of Jesus Christ is embodied in local parishes which were accountable to regional bishops and with worship centered in regular sacramental practice (especially the Lord's Supper). Despite occasional conflict with certain priests or bishops, the Wesleys understood their work to be in fundamental harmony with the Church of England.

The Wesleys' central beliefs about the nature and mission of the Church remain important among Wesleyans today. They include evangelical catholicity, the priesthood of all believers, Methodism as a renewal movement within the Church, and the importance of extending the work of the Church to all people, especially the poor.

Evangelical Catholicity: The Wesleys affirmed an evangelical catholicity, according to which there are many manifestations of the one, holy, catholic and apostolic Church, all of which proclaim Jesus Christ as Lord and give witness to the Kingdom of God. The Wesleys came to embrace such a view in large part because of the influence of their Anglican background. As noted in our discussion of the *via media*, the Church of England has always sought to be "broad" and to include within its communion a wide range of believers, including those with affinities for both Catholicism and Reformed Christianity. Anglicans also recognized that other churches (such as Lutheran and Catholic) maintained continuity with the one, true Church despite disagreement with those churches on certain doctrinal issues.

We find John Wesley's understanding of evangelical catholicity outlined especially in his sermon "The Catholic Spirit." In this sermon, John emphasizes the unity of the Church around the core essentials of Christian faith. He then distinguishes these essentials from the nonessentials, arguing that disagreement over the nonessentials should not hinder the unity of the Church. We may summarize his list of essentials as follows:

- A right heart with God (including absolute trust in and devotion to God and commitment to orthodox belief in God and God's perfections);
- Right faith in Christ (including both complete trust in Christ as Savior and a commitment to orthodox beliefs about Christ); and
- Right love for God and neighbor (including true affection and actions that appropriately express such affection).³⁰

²⁹ See John Wesley's sermon "The General Deliverance."

³⁰ Cf. John Wesley, "The Catholic Spirit." Wesley's list is technically more extensive than the one

This spirit of evangelical catholicity has continued to characterize the Wesleyan movement as a whole throughout its history.³¹

The Priesthood of All Believers: This is the teaching that all believers in Christ have access to God and are called to and empowered for Christian ministry. In other words, God grants the gifts of the Spirit to all believers and calls them to serve as ministers of the gospel.³² From the beginning of the Wesleyan movement, lay (non-ordained) ministers have played an important role in the life of the Church. Lay preachers were responsible for much of the spread of Methodism in both Britain and America, and all Methodists were expected to participate in ministry to those in need.

While some Christian groups have limited official church ministry (especially preaching and administration of the sacraments) to men, the Wesleyan movement has always affirmed the calling and ministry of women. John and Charles Wesley recognized the Holy Spirit at work in the ministries of women and included them among their lay preachers. Wesleyan denominations were among the first to fully ordain women for both preaching and sacramental service.³³ Likewise, the Church of the Nazarene has embraced women as ordained pastors, preachers, evangelists, and missionaries since its founding, and as a Wesleyan university, PLNU continues to seek to support both women and men as they seek to respond to God's calling in their lives.

Methodism as a Renewal Movement: Methodism was not founded by the Wesleys to be a distinct denomination or to replace the Church of England, but instead to be a network of small groups functioning as a reform movement within the larger Church in pursuit of holiness. Only later, when Methodists began to break from the Church of England, did they see themselves as a denomination of the larger Church of Jesus Christ. Likewise, Wesleyan churches have understood themselves to be

provided here, but may be effectively summed up in these three points.

³¹ PLNU founder Phineas F. Bresee often expressed this sentiment in one of his favorite maxims: "Unity in the essentials, diversity in the nonessentials, and charity in all things." An irenic approach to dogma such as this proved to be especially important in the formation of the Church of the Nazarene, which was forged as a union of various regional American holiness groups. These groups shared a common commitment to historical Christian orthodoxy and a common mission to promote the doctrine and life of holy love, but otherwise differed on several important doctrines and practices. A similar commitment to catholicity continues to exist within the Church of the Nazarene today. The Church of the Nazarene maintains its core commitment to the historic faith of the church and to the promotion of the gospel of holy love, but there is also allowance for loyal dissent and a certain amount of diversity on matters of belief and practice within our church. Moreover, like the Wesleys, Nazarenes gladly extend the hand of Christian fellowship to all those who call on the name of Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior, whether Protestant, Roman Catholic, or Eastern Orthodox. We consider all to be our sisters and brothers in Christ even if we disagree with them on various not insignificant matters of doctrine and practice.

³² Most churches in the Wesleyan tradition still withhold oversight of certain rites—such as baptism, communion, and marriage—to ministers who have been specially ordained for such oversight.

³³ Cf. Paul W. Chilcote, *She Offered Them Christ: The Legacy of Women Preachers in Early Methodism* (Wipf & Stock, 2001) and Rebecca Laird, *Ordained Women in the Church of the Nazarene* (Nazarene Publishing House, 1993).

expressions of the one true Church, but with the special mission of calling all people to lives of holiness.³⁴

Ministry to All, Especially the Poor: For Wesleyans the mission of the Church is to be the Body of Christ enfolding *all* people into God’s love. From the very beginning, Methodism was a movement that reached out to common people, many of whom were poor, and incorporated them into the life of the Church. If the call of the Christian is to love God with our heart, soul, mind and strength and our neighbor as ourselves, then loving God cannot be separated from loving and including everyone, especially those who are in physical, spiritual, or material need (Luke 10:29-37). As God’s love is expressed in the incarnation of Jesus who became one with us in order to redeem us, true followers of Jesus continually seek to love and care for those in need.

The early Methodists expressed their conviction that the love of God is for all people by taking the gospel out of the “sanctuary” and into the “streets.” This is especially illustrated in their commitment to “field preaching,” that is, to preaching the gospel to people wherever they gathered. The Wesleys regularly preached to people in town squares and to those on their way to work in the fields or the mines. There were times when the Wesleys and other itinerant Methodist preachers were criticized by Anglican leaders for encroaching on the territory of local parishes, to which John retorted, “All the world is my parish!” and claimed that they were simply taking the gospel to places and people not being reached by the Church of England.

This same conviction was expressed through early Methodist acts of mercy. While Anglican charity was distributed largely through local parishes, the early Methodists were intent to visit and care for the poor wherever they might be found. We may speak of these practices as exhibiting a kind of “missional” movement for they marked a true broadening of the Church’s mission beyond the confines of the local parish or church building.³⁵ In a similar fashion, throughout the history of the Wesleyan movement, Wesleyan churches have understood their mission to include living out the gospel among all people, and especially among the poor.

Section VI: The Means of Grace: Practices God Uses to Make us Holy

Christian disciplines or practices have played a significant role in the life of the Wesleyan movement. In fact, the Wesleys and their followers received the name “Methodist” because they prescribed certain methods or practices for growth in Christlikeness. Wesleyans refer to these practices as “means of grace”—that is, means through which God’s grace works to make us holy. We are called to participate in the means of grace, for without such participation we limit our capacity to be recipients of sanctifying grace. As with the new birth, God will not make us holy without our willing and responsible participation. But, to be clear, Wesleyans strongly affirm that people cannot become holy through their own efforts. The actual work of transformation is ultimately God’s work. The desire for growth comes from God, the ability to respond and act in obedience is inspired by God, and the growth itself is empowered by God.

³⁴ For the church, see the Foreword to the *Manual: Church of the Nazarene, 2009-2013* (Nazarene Publishing House, 2009), 5; and the introductory statement for *The Manual of the Church of the Nazarene* (1898). For the university see Ron Kirkemo, *For Zion’s Sake: A History of Pasadena/Point Loma College* (Point Loma Press, 2008), 32-33.

³⁵ By “missional” we mean “God’s people participating in God’s redemptive mission in the world.”

To illustrate this point, consider the metaphor of a sailor and a sail boat. The sailor has not created the boat, the water in which it floats, the wind that propels its sails, or the laws of physics that allow sail boats to sail. Nor can the sailor control the wind. What the sailor can do, however, is learn to read the wind and steer the rudder in such a way that the sail is properly attuned to the power and direction of the wind. That is, the boat will never sail from one place to another without the efforts of the sailor, but it is never actually the sailor who moves the boat. It is only the wind that does so. Such are the means of grace: they are the practices in which we may participate by which the Holy Spirit propels us forward in the life of faith.

The means of grace can be roughly divided into three categories: sacraments, works (or acts) of mercy, and works (or acts) of piety. The *sacraments* are important means of grace for the Wesleyan tradition. In keeping with the teachings of the Church of England and most Protestant churches, the Wesleys affirmed two sacraments—baptism and holy communion—as practices ordained (thus often called “ordinances”) by Christ himself as “outward and visible signs of inward and spiritual grace.” In other words, they believed that by the Spirit we are the recipients of grace through our obedient participation in the sacraments.³⁶ So important was the celebration of communion to the Wesleys that they advocated daily attendance at the Lord’s Table and, in 1745, they published a collection titled *Hymns on the Lord’s Supper* that includes 166 hymns!³⁷

³⁶ In this respect, the Wesleys held to an understanding of the sacraments quite different from the memorialist view of many contemporary evangelical Christians for which baptism and communion are events through which we remember and/or make testimony to what God in Christ has *already* done for us. So, for instance, they affirmed the practice of infant baptism as a legitimate means of salvific grace for children, with the proviso that they be raised to grow fully *into* their baptism through proper training, encouragement, and participation in the fellowship of Christ—the Church! They also advocated frequent attendance at communion for those believers earnestly seeking growth in holy love. The first Methodist group in Oxford, of which the Wesleys were a part, by rule sought communion a minimum of once daily. Later, in recognition that this was not possible for most believers, much less itinerant preachers such as themselves, the Wesleys adjusted the expectation for all Methodists to participation only once per week. Nevertheless, the Wesleys never ceased advocating both the duty and practical benefit of “constant communion.” Third, the Wesleys assumed that the Lord’s Supper would involve not merely words of institution, but also confession of sin, words of absolution, passing of the peace as signs of reconciliation with God and others, consecration of the bread and wine, and symbolic re-enactment of the sacrifice of Christ on the cross. Finally, in this instance out of step with Anglican teachings and practice, John Wesley advocated what today we call an open table—the belief that communion should be made available to both believers and nonbelievers alike. Because Christ is truly present at the table in the Lord’s Supper, he believed, even nonbelievers might come to the table and encounter the living God.

³⁷ See John Wesley’s sermon “The Duty of Constant Communion,” and Charles’ and John’s *Hymns on the Lord’s Supper*, republished in 1995 by the Charles Wesley Society.

Works of Mercy are means of grace through which we extend God's love to those in spiritual, physical, and material need. Both in Scripture and the Wesleyan tradition this includes caring for widows, orphans, strangers, and those who are naked, hungry, and imprisoned (Zech 7:10, Matt. 25:31-46).³⁸ There are numerous ways in which the Wesleys and their followers participated in works of mercy. For example, it was the practice of the early Methodists to visit the sick weekly. They also regularly gathered alms (the money often saved by fasting or skipping meals or giving up tea for water) which they then distributed among the poor. Wesley himself would on occasion take to the streets and go door to door begging for money to provide food and clothing for the poor, one time doing so for an entire week through the snow filled streets of London. He was in his 80s! Early Methodists also regularly visited prisons to talk and pray with prisoners and to bring them food and clothing. Wesleyans engaged in acts of mercy as a means of participating in God's love for those in need and in obedience to clear scriptural mandates. But they also understood acts of mercy as means of grace—means that God has established for our own growth in holiness. In other words, for us to grow in Christlikeness, as God has intended, we *must* engage in activities through which God's mercy is conveyed to others.

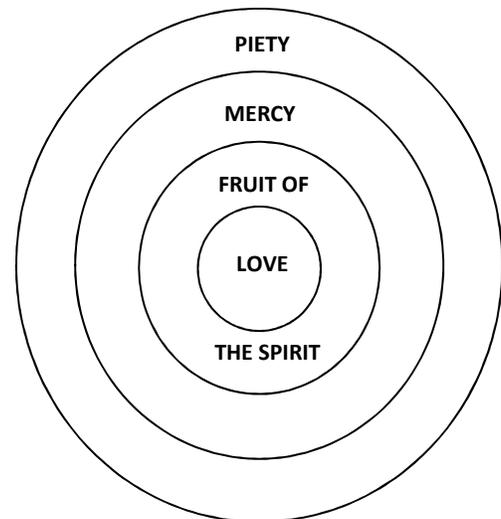
Works of Piety are additional communal and individual practices that lead to growth in Christlikeness. Individual acts of piety are means of grace practiced by believers, such as prayer, Bible reading, devotional reading, and fasting, just to name a few. The Christian spiritual formation movement has been influenced by the theology and practices of the Wesleyan tradition and may be looked at as a rediscovery of the importance of disciplines for growth in holiness.

Communal works of piety are any means of grace that believers do together that inspires and empowers growth in holiness. We believe that the Holy Spirit is present and at work in us whenever we gather together in the name of Christ for worship, accountability, prayer, and Bible study. The Wesleyan tradition has been very creative in developing communal acts of piety, such as covenant renewals, love feasts, and watch night services.

In a Christian believer *love* sits upon the throne which is erected in the inmost soul; namely, love of God and man, which fills the whole heart, and reigns without a rival. In a circle near the throne are all holy tempers—longsuffering, gentleness, meekness, fidelity, temperance; and if any other were comprised in "the mind which was in Christ Jesus." In an exterior circle are all the *works of mercy*, whether to the souls or bodies of men. By these we exercise all holy passions—by these we continually improve them, so that all these are real means of grace, although this is not commonly adverted to. Next to these are those that are usually termed *works of piety*—reading and hearing the word, public, family, private prayer, receiving the Lord's Supper, fasting or abstinence. Lastly, that his followers may the more effectually provoke one another to love, holy tempers, and good works, our blessed Lord has united them together in one body, the Church, dispersed all over the earth—a little emblem of which, of the Church universal, we have in every particular Christian congregation.

—John Wesley, *On Zeal*

THE CHURCH



³⁸ As the Methodist movement grew, they would take on more ambitious projects such as homes and schools for widows and orphans and support for the development of small businesses among the poor.

Small Groups: Likely the most significant of the communal means of grace, especially in early Methodism, was participation in class meetings and bands. These were small groups into which believers were organized for growth in holiness. In these meetings, believers found weekly support, encouragement, and spiritual direction. These groups especially provided accountability for believers' in their participation in all the means of grace. They formed the backbone of the early Methodist movement, and many scholars consider the formation of the network of such groups to be the chief reason for the success of early Methodism.

Section VII: Conclusion

The mission statement of Point Loma Nazarene University indicates that PLNU is “of Wesleyan heritage.” Our purpose in this paper has been to clarify, as clearly and concisely as possible, what we at PLNU mean by “Wesleyan heritage” or “the Wesleyan tradition.” Our primary sources have been the writings of John and Charles Wesley, the reflections of Wesleyan theologians over the past 250 years, and the history of practices within the Methodist movement. There is much more, of course, that could be said. It is our hope and expectation that this will serve as an introduction to Wesleyan thought and practice that will be expanded and expounded upon by further reading, conversation, and practice.

We affirm that, at its heart, *the Wesleyan tradition is a movement within the larger Church of Jesus Christ especially emphasizing that God calls us to and empowers us for holiness of heart and life—that is, complete devotion to God and love for neighbor.* We also list the following as summary of core tenets and vital practices of the Wesleyan tradition:

I. The Wesleyan Tradition

- Wesleyans seek to find a theological *via media* that draws upon, holds together, and affirms the true depth and breadth of the Scriptures and the orthodox Christian tradition as they give witness to the Word of God, Jesus Christ.
- Wesleyans believe that theology should be *practical*. Our primary concern is the transformation of the lives of sincere seekers into the likeness of Christ through repentance, spiritual disciplines, and practices that cultivate hearts and lives of holiness.

II. The Triune God of Love

- Wesleyans affirm all that is stated in the classic creeds of the Church (the Apostles', Nicene, and Chalcedonian).
- We especially emphasize that God is love. We generally understand God's sovereignty in terms of God's love.
- We are Trinitarian, affirming that God is three persons in one Being and that the love of the Father is revealed fully in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ by the power and witness of the Holy Spirit.

III. Revelation and Authority: God's Word Revealed in Scripture and Nature

- We affirm that Scripture is the primary witness to the revelation of Jesus Christ, the Word of God, and that Scripture is authoritative in all matters of Christian faith and practice. We also affirm that the primary purpose of Scripture is to lead us to faith and holiness in Christ.
- We affirm that nature gives witness to the wonder, majesty, and glory of Jesus Christ, the Word of God, through whom all things were created and in whom all things hold together.
- We affirm that the Holy Spirit reveals God's Word to us in Scripture and nature by enlivening our spiritual sensibilities and rational capacities so that we may discern things otherwise invisible to us.
- We affirm that believers may most fully understand God's Word in Scripture and nature when confirmed by the witness of the Holy Spirit, aided by Spirit-enlivened reason, and guided by the historic wisdom of the Church.

IV. Sin, Salvation, and Christian Holiness: The Ruin and Restoration of Love

- We affirm that humans were created in the image and likeness of God, intended for loving relationship with God and to reflect God's love in and for all creation.
- We affirm that, because of the universal effects of sin, we have lost our capacity to love God, others and all of creation as God intends.
- We affirm that, even in the greatest depths of our sins, we live in the continual presence of God's "prevenient grace"—the grace given to us by God *before* we have come to faith in Christ.
- We affirm that God's prevenient grace frees us to confess and repent of our lives of sin and offer ourselves in obedience to God.
- We affirm that we participate responsibly with God in our salvation through repentance and obedience, but always and only by the grace of God.
- We affirm that God's saving grace justifies us and reconciles us to God. God forgives the guilt of our sins and we are no longer estranged from God.
- We affirm the work of the Holy Spirit in sanctification of believers. Subsequent to justification, the Holy Spirit entirely renews the image of God in us so that we are no longer enslaved to sin but instead freed for complete devotion to God and love for others. This is commonly referred to as "entire sanctification."
- We affirm that God's purposes for salvation are not limited to individuals, but have implications for all relationships, all communities and societies, and even the world that we inhabit.

V. *The Church: The People of God Made Holy in Love*

- We affirm the nature and mission of the Church as “one, holy, catholic and apostolic.”
- We affirm an *evangelical catholicity* and thereby claim as sisters and brothers in Christ all who trust fully in Christ, affirm the faith passed to us by the saints in the creeds of the Church, and earnestly seek complete devotion to God and love for neighbor.
- We affirm the *priesthood of all believers* through which *all* believers have access to God’s grace and are both called to and empowered for Christian ministry.
- We affirm that the Wesleyan movement is a reform movement in pursuit of holiness within and for the entire Church of Jesus Christ.
- We affirm a special calling and commitment to minister to and among the poor. We draw this especially from the heritage of the early Methodists, who reached out to common people, many of whom were poor, cared for their physical, material and spiritual needs, and incorporated them into the life of the Church.
- We affirm that the mission of the Church includes preaching the Gospel to all people, even to the ends of the earth.

VI. *The Means of Grace: Practices God Uses to Make us Holy*

- We emphasize Christian discipleship through the practices of Christian formation. We understand the sacraments and acts of piety and mercy to be means of grace through which God forms us in Christlikeness.
- We affirm and prescribe participation in two sacraments—baptism and Holy Communion—as means of grace ordained by Christ for all believers. In receiving the sacraments, we believe that we partake of the grace of God and participate in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ.
- We prescribe *Works of Mercy* (caring for those in physical, emotional, and spiritual need) as both means of conveying the love of God for people in need and as means through which we are formed in the character of holiness.
- We prescribe *Works of Piety* (reading Scripture, prayer and fasting, etc.) as a means through which we not only discern the Word of God, but also through which we are formed in the character of holiness.
- We prescribe participation in groups in which we hold each other accountable for acts of mercy and piety as we respond to God’s call of holiness of heart and life.

Appendix A. The Classic Creeds of the Christian Church

The Apostles Creed

I believe in God, the Father almighty, creator of heaven and earth.

I believe in Jesus Christ, his only Son, our Lord, who was conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of the Virgin Mary, suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, died, and was buried; he descended to the dead. On the third day he rose again; he ascended into heaven, he is seated at the right hand of the Father, and he will come to judge the living and the dead.

I believe in the Holy Spirit, the holy catholic (universal) Church, the communion of saints, the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body, and the life everlasting.

Amen.

The Nicene Creed (381)

We believe in one God, the Father, the Almighty, maker of heaven and earth, of all that is, seen and unseen.

We believe in one Lord, Jesus Christ, the only Son of God, eternally begotten of the Father, God from God, Light from Light, true God from true God, begotten, not made, of one Being with the Father. Through him all things were made. For us and for our salvation he came down from heaven: by the power of the Holy Spirit he became incarnate from the Virgin Mary, and was made man. For our sake he was crucified under Pontius Pilate; he suffered death and was buried. On the third day he rose again in accordance with the Scriptures; he ascended into heaven and is seated at the right hand of the Father. He will come again in glory to judge the living and the dead, and his kingdom will have no end.

We believe in the Holy Spirit, the Lord, the giver of life, who proceeds from the Father [and the Son]. With the Father and the Son he is worshiped and glorified. He has spoken through the Prophets.

We believe in one, holy, catholic, and apostolic Church. We acknowledge one baptism for the forgiveness of sins. We look for the resurrection of the dead, and the life of the world to come.

*The Chalcedonian Definition (451)*³⁹

Therefore, we all in unison teach that [the Church] should confess the Son, our Lord Jesus Christ, as one and the same. He is perfect in divinity, and he is perfect in humanity. He is truly God, and he is truly human, having a body and a rational soul. He shares the same being with the Father in regard to his divinity, and he shares the same being with us in regard to his humanity. In every way he is similar to us, except for sin. Before time he was begotten of the Father. But in the last days, for us and for our salvation he was born of the Virgin Mary—the God-bearer—in regard to his humanity. Yet he remained one and the same Christ, Son, Lord and Only-Begotten. He is recognized in two natures without confusion, change, division or separation. The difference between the natures was never nullified because of the union. Instead, the particular nature of each is preserved and runs parallel in one person and one reality. He is not split or divided into

³⁹ Translated from the Greek by Mark G. Bilby.

two persons. Instead, he remains one and the same Son, Only-Begotten, Word, Lord, Jesus Christ. This is just as the prophets of old taught about him, and as Jesus Christ himself taught us, and as the symbolic statement of the Fathers [the Nicene Creed] handed down to us.

*Appendix B: The Articles of Faith of the Church of the Nazarene
(2009-13 Manual, Church of the Nazarene)*

I. The Triune God

1. We believe in one eternally existent, infinite God, Sovereign Creator and Sustainer of the universe; that He only is God, [creative and administrative,] holy in nature, attributes, and purpose[;]. The God who is holy love and light [that He, as God,] is Triune in essential being, revealed as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

(Genesis 1; Leviticus 19:2; Deuteronomy 6:4-5; Isaiah 5:16; 6:1-7; 40:18-31; Matthew 3:16-17; 28:19-20; John 14:6-27; 1 Corinthians 8:6; 2 Corinthians 13:14; Galatians 4:4-6; Ephesians 2:13-18; 1 John 1:5; 4:8)

II. Jesus Christ

2. We believe in Jesus Christ, the Second Person of the Triune Godhead; that He was eternally one with the Father; that He became incarnate by the Holy Spirit and was born of the Virgin Mary, so that two whole and perfect natures, that is to say the Godhead and manhood, are thus united in one Person very God and very man, the God-man.

We believe that Jesus Christ died for our sins, and that He truly arose from the dead and took again His body, together with all things appertaining to the perfection of man's nature, wherewith He ascended into heaven and is there engaged in intercession for us.

(Matthew 1:20-25; 16:15-16; Luke 1:26-35; John 1:1-18; Acts 2:22-36; Romans 8:3, 32-34; Galatians 4:4-5; Philippians 2:5-11; Colossians 1:12-22; 1 Timothy 6:14-16; Hebrews 1:1-5; 7:22-28; 9:24-28; 1 John 1:1-3; 4:2-3, 15)

III. The Holy Spirit

3. We believe in the Holy Spirit, the Third Person of the Triune Godhead, that He is ever present and efficiently active in and with the Church of Christ, convincing the world of sin, regenerating those who repent and believe, sanctifying believers, and guiding into all truth as it is in Jesus.

(John 7:39; 14:15-18, 26; 16:7-15; Acts 2:33; 15:8-9; Romans 8:1-27; Galatians 3:1-14; 4:6; Ephesians 3:14-21; 1 Thessalonians 4:7-8; 2 Thessalonians 2:13; 1 Peter 1:2; 1 John 3:24; 4:13)

IV. The Holy Scriptures

4. We believe in the plenary inspiration of the Holy Scriptures, by which we understand the 66 books of the Old and New Testaments, given by divine inspiration, inerrantly revealing the will of God concerning us in all things necessary to our salvation, so that whatever is not contained therein is not to be enjoined as an article of faith.

(Luke 24:44-47; John 10:35; 1 Corinthians 15:3-4; 2 Timothy 3:15-17; 1 Peter 1:10-12; 2 Peter 1:20-21)

V. Sin, Original and Personal

5. We believe that sin came into the world through the disobedience of our first parents, and death by sin. We believe that sin is of two kinds: original sin or depravity, and actual or personal sin.

5.1. We believe that original sin, or depravity, is that corruption of the nature of all the offspring of Adam by reason of which everyone is very far gone from original righteousness or the pure state of our first parents at the time of their creation, is averse to God, is without spiritual life, and inclined to evil, and that continually. We further believe that original sin continues to exist with the new life of the regenerate, until the heart is fully cleansed by the baptism with the Holy Spirit.

5.2. We believe that original sin differs from actual sin in that it constitutes an inherited propensity to actual sin for which no one is accountable until its divinely provided remedy is neglected or rejected.

5.3. We believe that actual or personal sin is a voluntary violation of a known law of God by a morally responsible person. It is therefore not to be confused with involuntary and inescapable shortcomings, infirmities, faults, mistakes, failures, or other deviations from a standard of perfect conduct that are the residual effects of the Fall. However, such innocent effects do not include attitudes or responses contrary to the spirit of Christ, which may properly be called sins of the spirit. We believe that personal sin is primarily and essentially a violation of the law of love; and that in relation to Christ sin may be defined as unbelief.

(Original sin: Genesis 3; 6:5; Job 15:14; Psalm 51:5; Jeremiah 17:9-10; Mark 7:21-23; Romans 1:18-25; 5:12-14; 7:1-8:9; 1 Corinthians 3:1-4; Galatians 5:16-25; 1 John 1:7-8

Personal sin: Matthew 22:36-40 {with 1 John 3:4}; John 8:34-36; 16:8-9; Romans 3:23; 6:15-23; 8:18-24; 14:23; 1 John 1:9-2:4; 3:7-10)

VI. Atonement

6. We believe that Jesus Christ, by His sufferings, by the shedding of His own blood, and by His death on the Cross, made a full atonement for all human sin, and that this Atonement is the only ground of salvation, and that it is sufficient for every individual of Adam's race. The Atonement is graciously efficacious for the salvation of [the irresponsible] those incapable of moral responsibility and for the children in innocence but is efficacious for the salvation of those who reach the age of responsibility only when they repent and believe.

(Isaiah 53:5-6, 11; Mark 10:45; Luke 24:46-48; John 1:29; 3:14-17; Acts 4:10-12; Romans 3:21-26; 4:17-25; 5:6-21; 1 Corinthians 6:20; 2 Corinthians 5:14-21; Galatians 1:3-4; 3:13-14; Colossians 1:19-23; 1 Timothy 2:3-6; Titus 2:11-14; Hebrews 2:9; 9:11-14; 13:12; 1 Peter 1:18-21; 2:19-25; 1 John 2:1-2)

VII. Prevenient Grace

7. We believe that the human race's creation in Godlikeness included ability to choose between right and wrong, and that thus human beings were made morally responsible; that through the fall of Adam they became depraved so that they cannot now turn and prepare themselves by their own natural strength and works to faith and calling upon God. But we also believe that the grace of God through Jesus Christ is

freely bestowed upon all people, enabling all who will to turn from sin to righteousness, believe on Jesus Christ for pardon and cleansing from sin, and follow good works pleasing and acceptable in His sight.

We believe that all persons, though in the possession of the experience of regeneration and entire sanctification, may fall from grace and apostatize and, unless they repent of their sins, be hopelessly and eternally lost.

(Godlikeness and moral responsibility: Genesis 1:26-27; 2:16-17; Deuteronomy 28:1-2; 30:19; Joshua 24:15; Psalm 8:3-5; Isaiah 1:8-10; Jeremiah 31:29-30; Ezekiel 18:1-4; Micah 6:8; Romans 1:19-20; 2:1-16; 14:7-12; Galatians 6:7-8. Natural inability: Job 14:4; 15:14; Psalms 14:1-4; 51:5; John 3:6a; Romans 3:10-12; 5:12-14, 20a; 7:14-25. Free grace and works of faith: Ezekiel 18:25-26; John 1:12-13; 3:6b; Acts 5:31; Romans 5:6-8, 18; 6:15-16, 23; 10:6-8; 11:22; 1 Corinthians 2:9-14; 10:1-12; 2 Corinthians 5:18-19; Galatians 5:6; Ephesians 2:8-10; Philippians 2:12-13; Colossians 1:21-23; 2 Timothy 4:10a; Titus 2:11-14; Hebrews 2:1-3; 3:12-15; 6:4-6; 10:26-31; James 2:18-22; 2 Peter 1:10-11; 2:20-22)

VIII. Repentance

8. We believe that repentance, which is a sincere and thorough change of the mind in regard to sin, involving a sense of personal guilt and a voluntary turning away from sin, is demanded of all who have by act or purpose become sinners against God. The Spirit of God gives to all who will repent the gracious help of penitence of heart and hope of mercy, that they may believe unto pardon and spiritual life.

(2 Chronicles 7:14; Psalms 32:5-6; 51:1-17; Isaiah 55:6-7; Jeremiah 3:12-14; Ezekiel 18:30-32; 33:14-16; Mark 1:14-15; Luke 3:1-14; 13:1-5; 18:9-14; Acts 2:38; 3:19; 5:31; 17:30-31; 26:16-18; Romans 2:4; 2 Corinthians 7:8-11; 1 Thessalonians 1:9; 2 Peter 3:9)

IX. Justification, Regeneration, and Adoption

9. We believe that justification is the gracious and judicial act of God by which He grants full pardon of all guilt and complete release from the penalty of sins committed, and acceptance as righteous, to all who believe on Jesus Christ and receive Him as Lord and Savior.

10. We believe that regeneration, or the new birth, is that gracious work of God whereby the moral nature of the repentant believer is spiritually quickened and given a distinctively spiritual life, capable of faith, love, and obedience.

11. We believe that adoption is that gracious act of God by which the justified and regenerated believer is constituted a son of God.

12. We believe that justification, regeneration, and adoption are simultaneous in the experience of seekers after God and are obtained upon the condition of faith, preceded by repentance; and that to this work and state of grace the Holy Spirit bears witness.

(Luke 18:14; John 1:12-13; 3:3-8; 5:24; Acts 13:39; Romans 1:17; 3:21-26, 28; 4:5-9, 17-25; 5:1, 16-19; 6:4; 7:6; 8:1, 15-17; 1 Corinthians 1:30; 6:11; 2 Corinthians 5:17-21; Galatians 2:16-21; 3:1-14, 26; 4:4-7; Ephesians 1:6-7; 2:1, 4-5; Philippians 3:3-9; Colossians 2:13; Titus 3:4-7; 1 Peter 1:23; 1 John 1:9; 3:1-2, 9; 4:7; 5:1, 9-13, 18)

X. Christian Holiness and Entire Sanctification

13. We believe that [entire] sanctification is [that] the [act] work of God[, subsequent to regeneration, by] which transforms believers into the likeness of Christ. It is wrought by God's grace through the Holy Spirit in initial sanctification, or regeneration (simultaneous with justification), entire sanctification, and the continued perfecting work of the Holy Spirit culminating in glorification. In glorification we are fully conformed to the image of the Son.

We believe that entire sanctification is that act of God, subsequent to regeneration, by which believers are made free from original sin, or depravity, and brought into a state of entire devotement to God, and the holy obedience of love made perfect.

It is wrought by the baptism with or infilling of the Holy Spirit, and comprehends in one experience the cleansing of the heart from sin and the abiding, indwelling presence of the Holy Spirit, empowering the believer for life and service.

Entire sanctification is provided by the blood of Jesus, is wrought instantaneously by grace through faith, preceded by entire consecration; and to this work and state of grace the Holy Spirit bears witness.

This experience is also known by various terms representing its different phases, such as "Christian perfection," "perfect love," "heart purity," "the baptism with or infilling of the Holy Spirit," "the fullness of the blessing," and "Christian holiness."

14. We believe that there is a marked distinction between a pure heart and a mature character. The former is obtained in an instant, the result of entire sanctification; the latter is the result of growth in grace.

We believe that the grace of entire sanctification includes the divine impulse to grow in grace as a Christlike disciple. However, this impulse must be consciously nurtured, and careful attention given to the requisites and processes of spiritual development and improvement in Christlikeness of character and personality. Without such purposeful endeavor, one's witness may be impaired and the grace itself frustrated and ultimately lost.

Participating in the means of grace, especially the fellowship, disciplines, and sacraments of the Church, believers grow in grace and in wholehearted love to God and neighbor.

(Jeremiah 31:31-34; Ezekiel 36:25-27; Malachi 3:2-3; Matthew 3:11-12; Luke 3:16-17; John 7:37-39; 14:15-23; 17:6-20; Acts 1:5; 2:1-4; 15:8-9; Romans 6:11-13, 19; 8:1-4, 8-14; 12:1-2; 2 Corinthians 6:14-7:1; Galatians 2:20; 5:16-25; Ephesians 3:14-21; 5:17-18, 25-27; Philippians 3:10-15; Colossians 3:1-17; 1 Thessalonians 5:23-24; Hebrews 4:9-11; 10:10-17; 12:1-2; 13:12; 1 John 1:7, 9)

("Christian perfection," "perfect love": Deuteronomy 30:6; Matthew 5:43-48; 22:37-40; Romans 12:9-21; 13:8-10; 1 Corinthians 13; Philippians 3:10-15; Hebrews 6:1; 1 John 4:17-18)

"Heart purity": Matthew 5:8; Acts 15:8-9; 1 Peter 1:22; 1 John 3:3

“Baptism with or infilling of the Holy Spirit”: Jeremiah 31:31-34; Ezekiel 36:25-27; Malachi 3:2-3; Matthew 3:11-12; Luke 3:16-17; Acts 1:5; 2:1-4; 15:8-9

“Fullness of the blessing”: Romans 15:29

“Christian holiness”: Matthew 5:1-7:29; John 15:1-11; Romans 12:1-15:3; 2 Corinthians 7:1; Ephesians 4:17-5:20; Philippians 1:9-11; 3:12-15; Colossians 2:20-3:17; 1 Thessalonians 3:13; 4:7-8; 5:23; 2 Timothy 2:19-22; Hebrews 10:19-25; 12:14; 13:20-21; 1 Peter 1:15-16; 2 Peter 1:1-11; 3:18; Jude 20-21)

XI. The Church

15. We believe in the Church, the community that confesses Jesus Christ as Lord, the covenant people of God made new in Christ, the Body of Christ called together by the Holy Spirit through the Word.

God calls the Church to express its life in the unity and fellowship of the Spirit; in worship through the preaching of the Word, observance of the sacraments, and ministry in His name; by obedience to Christ, holy living, and mutual accountability.

The mission of the Church in the world is to [continue] share in the redemptive and reconciling ministry [work] of Christ in the power of the Spirit [through holy living, evangelism, discipleship, and service]. The Church fulfills its mission by making disciples through evangelism, education, showing compassion, working for justice, and bearing witness to the kingdom of God.

The Church is a historical reality, which organizes itself in culturally conditioned forms; exists both as local congregations and as a universal body; sets apart persons called of God for specific ministries. God calls the Church to live under His rule in anticipation of the consummation at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.

(Exodus 19:3; Jeremiah 31:33; Matthew 8:11; 10:7; 16:13-19, 24; 18:15-20; 28:19-20; John 17:14-26; 20:21-23; Acts 1:7-8; 2:32-47; 6:1-2; 13:1; 14:23; Romans 2:28-29; 4:16; 10:9-15; 11:13-32; 12:1-8; 15:1-3; 1 Corinthians 3:5-9; 7:17; 11:1, 17-33; 12:3, 12-31; 14:26-40; 2 Corinthians 5:11-6:1; Galatians 5:6, 13-14; 6:1-5, 15; Ephesians 4:1-17; 5:25-27; Philippians 2:1-16; 1 Thessalonians 4:1-12; 1 Timothy 4:13; Hebrews 10:19-25; 1 Peter 1:1-2, 13; 2:4-12, 21; 4:1-2, 10-11; 1 John 4:17; Jude 24; Revelation 5:9-10)

XII. Baptism

16. We believe that Christian baptism, commanded by our Lord, is a sacrament signifying acceptance of the benefits of the atonement of Jesus Christ, to be administered to believers and declarative of their faith in Jesus Christ as their Savior, and full purpose of obedience in holiness and righteousness.

Baptism being a symbol of the new covenant, young children may be baptized, upon request of parents or guardians who shall give assurance for them of necessary Christian training. Baptism may be administered by sprinkling, pouring, or immersion, according to the choice of the applicant.

(Matthew 3:1-7; 28:16-20; Acts 2:37-41; 8:35-39; 10:44-48; 16:29-34; 19:1-6; Romans 6:3-4; Galatians 3:26-28; Colossians 2:12; 1 Peter 3:18-22)

XIII. The Lord's Supper

17. We believe that the Memorial and Communion Supper instituted by our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ is essentially a New Testament sacrament, declarative of His sacrificial death, through the merits of which believers have life and salvation and promise of all spiritual blessings in Christ. It is distinctively for those who are prepared for reverent appreciation of its significance, and by it they show forth the Lord's death till He come again. It being the Communion feast, only those who have faith in Christ and love for the saints should be called to participate therein.

(Exodus 12:1-14; Matthew 26:26-29; Mark 14:22-25; Luke 22:17-20; John 6:28-58; 1 Corinthians 10:14-21; 11:23-32)

XIV. Divine Healing

18. We believe in the Bible doctrine of divine healing and urge our people to seek to offer the prayer of faith for the healing of the sick. We also believe God heals through the means of medical science.

(2 Kings 5:1-19; Psalm 103:1-5; Matthew 4:23-24; 9:18-35; John 4:46-54; Acts 5:12-16; 9:32-42; 14:8-15; 1 Corinthians 12:4-11; 2 Corinthians 12:7-10; James 5:13-16)

XV. Second Coming of Christ

19. We believe that the Lord Jesus Christ will come again; that we who are alive at His coming shall not precede them that are asleep in Christ Jesus; but that, if we are abiding in Him, we shall be caught up with the risen saints to meet the Lord in the air, so that we shall ever be with the Lord.

(Matthew 25:31-46; John 14:1-3; Acts 1:9-11; Philippians 3:20-21; 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18; Titus 2:11-14; Hebrews 9:26-28; 2 Peter 3:3-15; Revelation 1:7-8; 22:7-20)

XVI. Resurrection, Judgment, and Destiny

20. We believe in the resurrection of the dead, that the bodies both of the just and of the unjust shall be raised to life and united with their spirits—"they that have done good, unto the resurrection of life; and they that have done evil, unto the resurrection of damnation."

21. We believe in future judgment in which every person shall appear before God to be judged according to his or her deeds in this life.

22. We believe that glorious and everlasting life is assured to all who savingly believe in, and obediently follow, Jesus Christ our Lord; and that the finally impenitent shall suffer eternally in hell.

(Genesis 18:25; 1 Samuel 2:10; Psalm 50:6; Isaiah 26:19; Daniel 12:2-3; Matthew 25:31-46; Mark 9:43-48; Luke 16:19-31; 20:27-38; John 3:16-18; 5:25-29; 11:21-27; Acts 17:30-31; Romans 2:1-16; 14:7-12; 1 Corinthians 15:12-58; 2 Corinthians 5:10; 2 Thessalonians 1:5-10; Revelation 20:11-15; 22:1-15)